

Reaching Out



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From the Editor

Welcome to Reaching Out! Whether you are experiencing recovery on the inside or on the outside, this NA World Services newsletter is for you. As our literature says, "The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel." Reaching Out is designed to help incarcerated addicts connect to the NA program and enhance H&I efforts.

There are two sections; "From the Inside" is filled with letters from incarcerated addicts sharing their experience, strength, and hope as they find and maintain recovery from addiction through NA. In the second section, "From the Outside," NA members on the outside and Hospitals & Institutions subcommittees have a chance to offer their experience, strength, and hope. Many of these letters come from members who are deeply committed to carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the NA message on the inside and are now living and enjoying life on the outside.

We encourage submissions for Reaching Out from members and H&I subcommittees. Please consider that we are more likely to publish articles that focus on how NA has helped an individual to recover while incarcerated, rather than those that concentrate on the horrors of addiction. Thank you for helping us carry our message of hope! Send all submissions to Reaching Out; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to HandI@na.org.

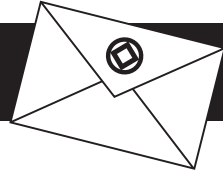
Share your gratitude in *Reaching Out*! We need letters from members who found NA on the inside and are now maintaining their recovery on the outside. If this is you, or you have a heart-warming H&I story, please share your experience, strength, and hope. This issue features a worksheet on page 14 designed to help our members contribute. Additional *Reaching Out* tools are available on our website:

http://www.na.org/?ID=reaching_out-index

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
January 2013	15 October 2012
April 2013	15 January 2013
July 2013	15 April 2013
October 2013	15 July 2013

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I just recently transferred from a county prison to a state institution. While I was in county jail, a chairperson came to the jail for a meeting. Me being stubborn, I didn't attend, but a fellow inmate went and brought back some literature. I had already been to a rehab, halfway house, and so on, and remained unsuccessful at staying clean, so my tolerance for NA at that time was next to nothing. However, a couple of pamphlets caught my attention, one of which was *Reaching Out*. I related to every letter in one way or another. A letter from SB in Kansas really drew me in. Being alone was so familiar to me at this point in my life, having just buried my mother a few months ago. And currently being incarcerated gives a person time to reflect.

Although I don't have the *Step Working Guides* that I desperately want and need, I am working my steps anyway. I am on Step Four and have been for a few months, but doing it alone is the absolute worst way to go about recovery. I need a sponsor. Everyone needs a sponsor who is serious about recovery. That was one of my first steps to my relapse—no support, no sponsor. I thought I could do it all alone. Well, look at me now! SB, I now want what you have. Your story inspired me. I've been working on myself since I've been in prison, and I'll be out in less than three months. There is hope and understanding, there are ears that listen in NA, and they are my only hope of recovering. To them and people like SB in Kansas who share their experience, strength, and hope, thank you so much!

Thank you, *Reaching Out*, for putting out a publication that really reaches out.

CD, PA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am currently serving twelve months. I tried to be placed on house arrest but the judge revoked that. I was flabbergasted! I thought about how unfair my sentence was. Through NA and my Fourth Step, I began to really look at my part in everything.

I used to laugh at the women who thanked God for being in jail. I learned through NA that I was lucky that I only got the twelve months; some people don't even have a release date.

While I am not happy to be here, I am using this time out to work on me. Prison has given me food, clothing, shelter, laundry service, work ethic, and job and school opportunities, to name just a few. I now realize that the world does not revolve around me. I do thank God for a better perspective on my situation. I choose to live an NA way of life. Thank you for putting the message of recovery and hope out for people like me.

JL, LA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am 30 years old and have been using since the age of 14. I always had this feeling that what I was doing was wrong from the very start. I never had any friends when I was little, and very few when I got a little older. I have had low self-esteem for as long as I can remember. I was tossed around from one family member to the next. My mom and dad were out getting loaded. I always wondered what was wrong with me, why nobody wanted to be my friend. My dad died in 2010 from this disease, and I always felt like he didn't want me. My mother was doing her thing, and when I was with her I never really felt that she wanted me around. All I wanted was to feel loved and accepted.

At 16, I was introduced to the drug that put my life on a downhill spiral. When I started getting loaded, I met people I could call friends. The funny thing is, when I was loaded it didn't matter if I had friends or not. I thought I was finally okay because I could talk to women, feel like one of the guys, and not feel the pain.

I have been in and out of jail since I was 15, due to my addiction. The last time I got out of prison I went to an AA meeting the first night and got really involved, but after a while I realized I couldn't relate on a deeper level with an alcoholic. When I got locked up this time my friend brought me a Basic Text, and I could relate to everything! I find myself reading it all the time, and it helps me in my recovery since there are no meetings here at all.

From the chapter "What Can I Do?" I was relieved to discover that I can begin my program from right here. When I get out, I no longer want to be a homeless person wondering where my next meal will

come from. I hurt the ones who loved me, blew off my kids, and isolated from everybody. I had never felt so hurt and alone as I did this last time, and I tried to stop but I couldn't. I always went back.

When I read the NA literature, I can understand and relate with the words. It helps me stay in touch with who I am and what's really going on with me. It helps me to feel that I'm not alone and gives me hope for a better life. I can just imagine what the program can do for me on the outside. I'm not sure of my fate yet in my legal battles, but with God and the people in the rooms I'm sure I will be okay and be ready for the outside when it's time.

A Fellow Addict,
LW, VA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is KM and I am an addict. I've been in and out of the rooms for years, and just never worked the program. I have been incarcerated from one state to another, running from my problems. Through NA, I found out that the problem is me.

I knew I would have to get involved in order to stay clean this time. I got arrested in 2007, and when I first got to this yard there was only one NA meeting a week. Today, thanks to my Higher Power, the NA members here, and one of our counselors, we have three meetings a week! I have found that carrying the message and being of service is how I help myself.

I've been clean now for 33 months. I have a sponsor, I work the steps, and I help the newcomers. Being an NA member is awesome. It's a new way of life, one that I cherish. To anyone who wants help, you can stay clean if you want to! Give yourself a break and apply yourself to this simple program. The only regret I have today is that I didn't take this program seriously the first time.

I still have over two and a half years of my sentence to build on my foundation here, and I look forward every day. Thanks, *Reaching Out*, for your newsletters and your support. I need you and love you.

KM, AZ

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is ML and I am an addict. I have been clean four and one-half years and I am now 39 years old. I became involved in NA because I wanted to learn how to live without using drugs and to learn another way of living life. In NA, I learned that I do not have to pick up and use drugs—no matter what.

Of course, I have been offered drugs in prison, and I have been able to say no. I am learning how to live a better life without drugs.

Using drugs is a slow death, as the literature says—jails, institutions, and death. Our disease is progressive. So even being in prison is not worse than the prison in one's own mind.

ML, CA

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

Tuesday, 13 March 2012, I cleared customs at the airport in Mexico for the first time. As soon as I walked through the doors, an NA member from Arizona, EW, was waiting to greet me. My flight had been delayed, so I understood when he said, "Come on. We are late for the meeting. You have to change your pants." Then he led me over to a group of NA members, friends I had not met yet. I pulled some clothes out of my bag and rushed into the bathroom to change, leaving my laptop and a bunch of NA memorabilia to be watched by five people I had never met before. (ONLY IN NA!!!!)

My new friend EV, a woman of incredible strength, courage, and integrity, took Ed and me to the prison. My pants were not right so I had to go to a truck and rent a pair of *pantalones* with a broken zipper and raggedy cuffs for 20 pesos. I went through all the rituals of entering a prison as a volunteer one more time. There were a number of guards carrying automatic weapons. EW and I had to carry EV up several short flights of stairs in her wheelchair. I was trying to take it all in, the guards' uniforms, the security procedures, the colors, the sounds, the smells. Yes, even in Mexico a prison smells like prisons in other countries.

Then when we got to the meeting room, the meeting had already started. It was in Spanish and I do not speak Spanish very well, but I understood the language of the heart that was pouring out in the voices of these men. Initially, I declined to share, but after EW spoke up with an eloquent message that the men in that meeting were an important and essential part of NA, I was reminded that I had come to share too.

Speaking slowly so that it would be easy to translate, I began to share my simple message. I asked the men how they liked their pillows, whether their mattress was comfortable, if they liked the clothes they were wearing and a few more things like that. Then I asked them, "Don't you deserve better than this?" Most nodded, "¡Sí!"

As I looked at their faces a realization on a gut level spread through my body. An intrinsic understanding became evident.

When I entered the prison, I had looked in the faces of the visitors who were leaving. What was etched in their faces was pain, despair, shame, degradation, resignation, and a host of negative emotions. I remembered causing this pain and shame to my loved ones as I reminded these men that they were the reason their wives did not have husbands to hold them and their children did not have fathers to teach them; and that their behavior inflicted the pain on those whom they love. Then I shared about how we were all in that room because of choices we had made, and that some of our choices would allow us to go home in an hour or two while others were living with consequences that kept them locked up longer than others. We all had the same choice at this moment: to stay clean right now. We all heard me say, "It is always right now. If we don't take anything to change the way we feel right now, we will stay clean." Leaving that prison with EW and EV, I was overwhelmed once more by the gratitude I experience being clean and free, no longer a slave to active addiction and its results and consequences. That evening we went to a meeting in the city. The next morning we drove to the NA convention, which was great fun. My dear friend A and I presented a workshop, *Servicio con Amor* ("Service with Love"). It was so gratifying to lock eyes with an addict who was hearing a new point of view that was changing her perspective, to see attitudes being affected as my words were translated, to speak of ideals and see where I was falling short of living up to them, and to expose myself to people in a place where I did not speak the language while finding a way to discuss the common points of identification in explaining how to make service fun and attractive.

Over the next few days I made many new friends and learned the proper way to greet friends in the NA way *a la Mexicana* which is a handshake followed by a heart-to-heart left-sided hug followed by another handshake. My last day in Mexico was rather exciting since we were on the floor of a mall when an earthquake started undulating the building. My friend EV said, "We are having an earthquake. What should we do?" EV, a woman of great courage, was in her wheelchair so I knew we weren't getting down the stairs immediately. Practicing the spiritual principle of equanimity I responded, "Is the building falling down?" She said, "No." So I said, "Let's finish our lunch then." It was a true moment of faith and surrender.

When I returned home, I received a phone call reminding me that I had been invited to share at a US prison the following evening. While I was there I read an article from a recovery newsletter to those men. Then I shared about going to an NA meeting in a prison in Mexico. It was heartwarming to share that experience while explaining the unlimited possibilities those men will have in front of them if they stay clean when they are released.

There are no challenges that we cannot overcome in recovery. We may not get the results we want or expect, but we can fulfill God's will for us. Once more I left feeling right in my heart and in my soul and spent time counting my blessings, one of which was my ability to be grateful. The next day I saw my oncologist. He reminded me of how fortunate I am to be free of a rare and aggressive form of cancer. Thus I counted one more blessing that had come from turning the results over to my HP. "THANK YOU, NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

JR, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is CT and I had been incarcerated for ten years for a life-threatening crime. I live in Hawaii, and at the time of my crime I was off and running in my addiction. I didn't care about myself and felt like the world was to blame for my bad luck.

While incarcerated, I learned about these meetings that deal with addiction. At first I believed they were church meetings or people who wanted to save me. I was wrong; the NA meetings were full of convicts like myself who didn't know what to do except use and go to jail. I was coming up for parole, and up until that point in my life I had never considered not using drugs. The NA meetings had men in them who were hard-core drug addicts, only they were acting differently, not as aggressive. They talked about growing up.

I got out on parole and was looking at six years, which meant if I committed a crime, I was back doing my time. My counselor suggested I try this NA meeting. For six months, I went weekly and listened. One day they asked me to pass out keytags, and I was scared. How could I do this? All the group did was ask me to try, and they would help me. Well, the following week I passed out keytag again. Shortly thereafter, I became the group's keytag person. My plan was to show up and listen, take what I heard, and leave. Well,

after six months the group asked me to be secretary, and I said no because I was too shy. I finally did agree to be secretary so that they would quit asking. That commitment turned into one year, and I didn't want to give it up. We needed another NA meeting on the side of the island I live on, and so I asked some members to help me in starting a new meeting. I am happy to say the meeting is two years old and well attended.

I celebrated eight years clean last month and have two years left on my parole. There is no way I would have been able to do this alone without NA. I know that now.

Thanks for bringing NA to me when I needed it the most. Thanks for helping me learn how to help myself. I have my children in my life, which is sometimes hard, but it is never as hard as using made it.

CT, HI

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is A, and I am a woman in recovery. I began using when my husband passed away. From then on I used continuously. I felt very down, thinking about my late husband. I used it as an excuse. I thought I would die using.

But there came the day when I was physically not well. Even though I tried to stop, I would always start using again—just one more.

I became more and more desperate when I remembered one of my friends sharing some of her experiences, and how she was in recovery.

I went and spoke with her and she said to me, "You have to make the decision. Who do you want to be, and what do you want to do?" I made the decision that I wanted something different, and it was then that I was introduced to NA.

Not too long after my introduction I attended the area H&I subcommittee meeting. I decided to join the subcommittee.

Being in recovery, and being a member of the H&I committee, I have learned a lot about myself. I have even become friends with a few of the other women in NA.

Being involved in H&I has carried me through my recovery. I look forward to my panel each and every month, having the opportunity to give hope to those who believe they are hopeless, with no self-worth or self-confidence, and to let them know that dreams do come true.

Today I know that one of the most important things I can do is show up at NA and that H&I panel meeting. It shows me that it is possible for my Higher Power to work miracles in my life. Thank you, God.

I am truly grateful to NA and to H&I.

AC, India

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is B, and I am from Tennessee where I attend a local Narcotics Anonymous meeting. As a general rule I do not write to people who are incarcerated; but since I was "on the inside" for nine years, I feel I qualify to share my experience, strength, and hope. By the time I was 18, I was in bad shape from drugs and drinking. My attitude, in a sense my motto, was that rock 'n roll music and using drugs was the way to live. All of my best friends did the same things. Although I have better-than-average intelligence and was a good athlete, my life seemed to be on a downward spiral. I did manage to graduate from college, where my main goal was to be high every night. All the emotional and mental turmoil most addicts go through was also my experience, including bad relationships and wasted employment opportunities. My initial brushes with law enforcement were stints in the county jail.

My introduction to recovery came from another fellowship that helped me remain abstinent for a couple of years in my late thirties. I married a good, decent woman. But life was getting me down, and I was just going to another fellowship. Although my life was better, I had no understanding of spiritual principles; today, I am learning honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness, which is very important.

Physical problems showed up from running obsessively, forgoing rest, and working too many hours; I neglected family and enjoying life without the use of drugs and alcohol. In fact, I didn't learn how people were living without the use of drugs; I had not found NA yet. At age forty I abandoned my child and my wife, and found new drugs and ways to degrade myself and be degraded. There were no longer morals in my life and I lived only to use, which led to a cycle of jails for many years. To say I was insane is putting it mildly. I gave away everything I had worked for or that was valuable in my life. I had no worth as a human being.

I had some brief periods of some sort of sobriety while attending AA that helped improve my life, but my disease of addiction always manifested itself in self-will while I had everything going my way. Finally, I was introduced to NA in January 2010, and was clean for around 14 months. I made an excuse of chronic pain and did not surrender to a god of my understanding. In those 14 months I made progress, but I relapsed on medications until I came back on 3 February 2011. I called my sponsor and picked up a white keytag, and finally, through God's grace, surrendered much of my past and sincerely asked for the help of my HIGHER POWER. I started setting up meetings, and eventually became a chairperson at my NA home group. A chairperson is just someone in NA who is trying to give back and leads the meeting.

These little steps of mine to do something different, positive, and responsible brought me into contact with a wonderful fellowship, and I started a whole new way of life that is so much better. My sponsor and I kept attending AA meetings, and I even got a job working at an AA clubhouse, but most of my solution has come from listening to other addicts, trying to be of help to the still-suffering addict, and making some small spiritual progress in my life. My whole life is changing, and it is because of the recovering addicts who mean so much to me and keep loving me and giving me hope. I owe my life to this program and my higher power that I call God. I take care of my elderly parents, am trusted by a lot of people, and care about myself in a way I never have.

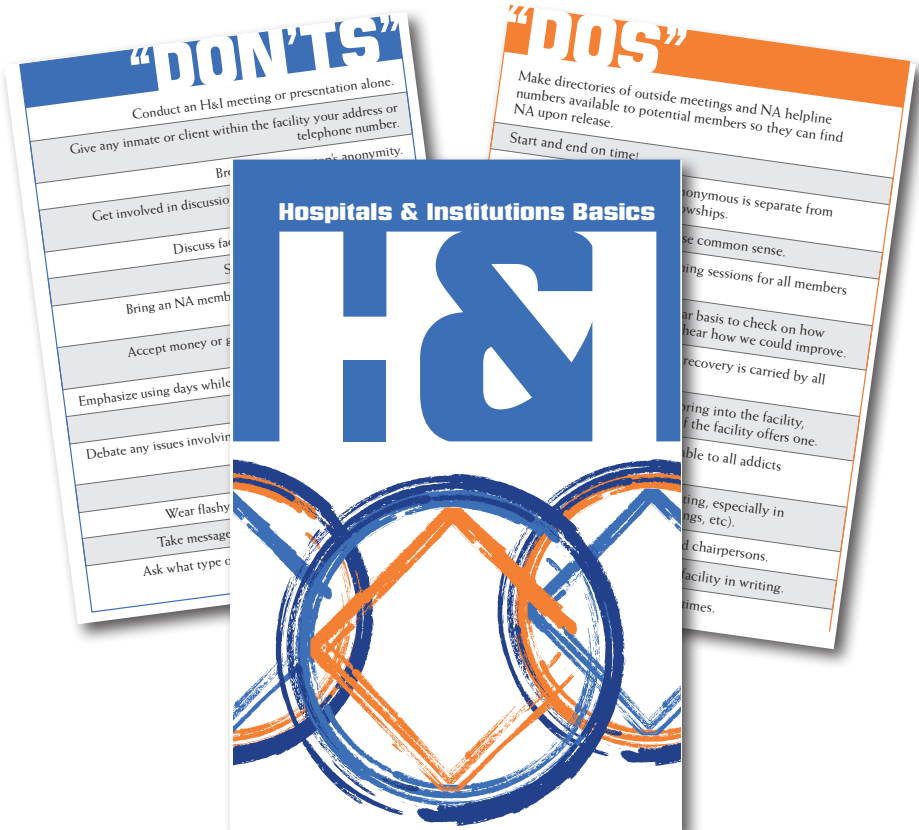
I have started a relationship with my 18-year-old daughter again. We have an important slogan "Just for today, I can stay clean, and let my god take care of tomorrow." It is a real privilege to write to you. I have so much to work on, but that's okay because today is all right. I have been where you have been, and it is terrible, but it will pass. Try to attend any recovery meetings you can, get hold of some NA books, and pray. If I can get off the streets and stay out of jail, I know you can get better and stay clean. Recovery takes time and patience, but I like my life today, and have real friends and goals. Hang in there; you can get clean and have a real life.

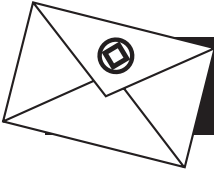
Your friend in NA, B

ART FROM THE OUTSIDE

Reaching Out is trying something new! NA communities design beautiful, recovery-oriented art for committees, conventions, and events. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act, and images provide a powerful message of the freedom we can find in NA.

We would like to showcase art from the outside. We need you to send jpegs or pdf files to HandI@na.org or mail to: *Reaching Out* c/o NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409.





INSIDE / OUTSIDE

CALLING ALL H&I MEMBERS!

Please submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, Reaching Out. We are looking for recovering addicts, like you, to share their experience of finding recovery behind the walls and maintaining it on the outside. Your story carries a powerful message of hope for the incarcerated addict!

What was your first contact with NA behind the walls? _____

How did you work the NA program while incarcerated? _____

Do you have a particular H&I experience you would like to share?

Describe your transition from incarceration to your NA community on the outside. _____

Tell us about your first NA meeting on the outside. _____

What benefits of recovery have you experienced? _____

Thank you for sharing! Your experience with the NA program can inspire other addicts seeking fellowship and recovery.

Please send your story to:
Narcotics Anonymous World Services;
PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409,
or HandI@na.org.

To download a pdf of this worksheet, go to
http://www.na.org/?ID=reaching_out-index.



“When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man’s entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous.”

Narcotics Anonymous, “We Do Recover”

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available free of charge to incarcerated addicts through Narcotics Anonymous World Services. If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months and would like a free subscription to *Reaching Out*, complete and return the following form.

Reaching Out is also available by a 20-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$32.60 annually. If you are interested in purchasing a bulk subscription, please complete the following form and return it along with a check or money order.

- I am an incarcerated addict (and will be for at least six more months) and want a free subscription to *Reaching Out*.
- I want to purchase _____ 20-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$32.60 each, total \$ _____.

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